

Examining Intended Consequences of MGNREGP Intervention on Women Empowerment: Evidences from Block Level Study in Jodhpur District of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

Based on the primary data collected from 180 households, the present study investigated the impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP) on women empowerment in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan. Besides, the paper looked into the extent of participation of marginalized sections of the society in the programme and intra-household effect of MGNREGP income. The result of z-statistic revealed the significance difference in the extent of employment of male and female workers and women have more than three-fourth (76.50 %) share in workforce in MGNREGP in the district. The programme proved to be gender-friendly and has benefitted the participating women, both tangibly and intangibly, to a large extent by accentuating their choices and capabilities for investments on better food baskets, children's education as well as increased their bargaining power in household's decision process.

Keywords: Employment, intra-household effect, MGNREGP, rajasthan, women empowerment,

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is the inevitable push factor for growth and development of developing countries like India. Although, women have significantly contributed to economic productivity of the country; their role has been often envisaged as flaccid. Moreover it is observed that women are often experienced the situation of extreme poverty which are further aggravated by household and social discrimination. Nonetheless, women-centric policies of the government in the recent past played vital role in empowering significant portion of urban women, but their counterparts living in rural areas are only marginally benefitted. Gender equality and empowerment of women in the rural society is prerequisite for inclusive growth and overall development of the society.

The introduction of Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee programme (MGNREGP) which was notified on 7 September, 2005, and implemented in

all the rural districts of India in April 2008, is unanimously perceived as significant policy departure of government of India from the conventional way of looking at means of socio-economic empowerment of rural women. Since the launching of MGNREGP, various studies at national as well as regional level have been carried out for assessing its impact on rural poverty, livelihood and food security, and rural-urban migration (Raju, 2011; Tiwari *et al.*, 2011; Bardhan, 2011).

Most of the standard studies across the country pertaining to the impact of MGNREGP on women empowerment reported that women have benefitted by the programme individually through access to income for family needs and (Minati, 2014; Afridi *et al.*, 2016) and by accentuating their choice and capabilities (Panjak and Tankha 2010; Ravindar, 2016). However, findings from few Indian states like Bihar (Dutta *et al.* 2014) and Kashmir (Pandey and Ahmedwani, 2014) revealed that the programme's potential to uplift the socio-economic

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status of rural women is not fully realized and women are more likely to be rationed out of programme work than men.

In Rajasthan the programme is in operation in all the districts since 2008 and it envisages mainly conserving natural resources, like water conservation and management of traditional water resources, afforestation, flood control, land development, road construction, etc. Nonetheless, a good number of literature looking into the democratic administration and implementation aspects of the programme in the state as well as its impact on wages in rural labour markets are available (Nair *et al.*, 2013; Pamecha *et al.*, 2015); the study pertaining to its role in empowering women in the state is scant. In this backdrop, the present study was planned to study the impact of MGNREGP on socio-economic status of rural women in the arid region of Western Rajasthan.

METHODOLOGY

Data

The study is based on primary data collected from 180 rural households in the agricultural years 2012-13. A multistage stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the sample for this investigation. Three blocks namely Phalodi, Bilara and Luni of Jodhpur district were randomly selected for present study to cover maximum diversity. Further, two villages from each block and 30 households from each village were randomly selected, thus making total sample size of 180, for detailed primary data collection.

Analytical procedure

In order to quantify the impact of the MGNREGP on decision making capabilities of rural women, simple tabular analysis in percentage terms has been done. Before and after approach was used to assess the change in average working hours/day of women in other household activities.

The z-test was applied to test the hypothesis of no difference in average days of employment received by male and female participants of MGNREGP. Following formula was used to calculate the test statistics value:

$$Z = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\sigma_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{\sigma_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

Where, \bar{X}_1 and \bar{X}_2 are the respective means of employment days for female and male participants under MGNREGP and σ_1^2 and σ_2^2 are the variances for two samples of n_1 (female) and n_2 (male) size, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of employment in MGNREGP

As landholdings of the households significantly influence the employment in rural areas, sources of income of MGNREGP beneficiaries across land size classes was analyzed and the results have been presented in Table 1. Most of the households (70 %) in the sample had the land size below 2 hectare (Table 1). Crop cultivation was the major source of income for large farmers, however, overall and for the rest of the land size categories, others sources had major share in their income basket. As we move from bottom to top in the column, the share of income from MGNREGP increases. Further, the programme is second major source of income for marginal and landless households signifying its importance in employment for resource-poor households in the rural areas.

Table 1: Sources of income of MGNREGP beneficiaries across land size classes

Land size classes	No. of respondents	Average size of holdings (ha)	Sources of income (%)				
			Crop	Livestock	Agril. wages	MGNRE GP	Others*
Landless	36	0	0	8.98	16.87	23.54	50.61
Marginal	39	0.89	5.45	10.22	17.23	17.37	49.73
Small	51	1.56	8.16	11.7	13.99	13.99	52.16
Medium	42	4.56	18.39	16.95	12.02	12.02	40.62
Large	12	24.72	54.13	18.68	2.13	1.34	23.72
Overall	180	3.34	17.23	13.31	12.45	13.65	43.37

Source: Survey data

*Note: Others sources includes income from construction works, small business and salaries.

Employment pattern of sample households

To see the employment pattern of sample households, data regarding participation of households across social classes has been analyzed and presented in Table 2. It is evident that participation of households belonging to SC category (19.64 %) and ST category (3.21 %) in the programme is very low compared to their "Others" counterpart.

Among the three studied blocks, participation rate of SC households in Bilara is comparatively better than the other two blocks, however participation of ST households in the block is minimum.

The gender wise analysis shows that women have more than three-fourth (76.50 %) share in workforce in MGNREGP in the district and their participation is highest in Luni block. Moreover, only around 8 % households had completed 100 days of guaranteed employment in MGNREGP in the district and the figure is further disappointing in Luni block (2.16 %).

Table 2: Status of women employment under MGNREGP in Jodhpur district

Blocks	SC (%)	ST (%)	Others (%)	Women (%)	Households getting 100 days employment (%)
Phalodi	11.56	3.23	85.21	70.57	6.20
Bilara	24.47	0.15	75.38	79.95	11.85
Luni	19.55	3.15	77.30	84.23	2.16
District	19.64	3.21	77.15	76.50	7.89

Source: Survey data

The estimated z-statistic (2.57) reveals that there was significant difference between the days of employment received by male and female workers of MGNREGP during the financial year 2012-13 (Table 3). This finding is encouraging in the sense that the implementation of MGNREGP in the district has succeeded in gender mainstreaming in the programme.

Table 3: Difference between male and female workers participation rate in MGNREGP works in Jodhpur

Particulars	Female workers	Male workers
Average employments (Number of days)	62.34	58.23
Variance	71.62	97.30
Observations	138	42
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
Z Calculated	2.44*	

Intra-household effects of MGNREG Pincome

An important aspect to look into is the ownership of income through MGNREGP as social-economic empowerment of women is related to the extent to which they can access their earnings independently. Greater access to paid income widens the scope of women in decision making roles in home (Kar, 2013). It is evident from Figure 1 that women kept majority of the earnings generated through the programme with her-self indicating its significance in broadening the choice and capabilities of rural women in the study area.

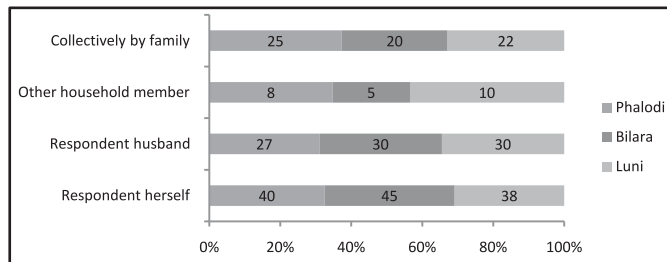


Figure 1: Ownership of MNREGP earnings by women across the blocks

Rising economic power of women translates into their greater bargaining power, thus allowing her to steer household resource allocation and choose consumption basket. A well established economic fact is that consumption has a multiplier effect on demand for several commodities.

Therefore, we were interested in exploring the income utilization pattern by the women beneficiaries and presented the findings in Table 4. Majority of the spending by the beneficiaries in Phalodi and Luni was on better food basket, however spending on children's education topped the priority list in Bilara block. Saving was the second most preferred way to utilize the increased income for mitigating financial distress in Luni.

Table 4: Use of MNREGP earnings by women across the blocks

Particulars / Tehsils	Phalodi		Bilara		Luni	
	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
Good food	25	I	21	II	30	I
Education of children	22	II	25	I	10	IV
Health	10	V	9	VI	9	V
Repayment of debts	20	III	17	III	19	III
Personal use (Cloths etc)	12	IV	13	IV	7	VI
Savings	7	VI	10	V	21	II
Others	4	VII	5	VII	4	VII

Source: Survey data

It is important to note that earnings through the programme are also promptly used in easing the debt burden by the beneficiaries. This expenditure pattern shows that money earned from MGNREGP was spent for quality of life and human development related issues.

Table 5: Change in average working hours / day of women before and after MGNREGP

Activities	Before MGNREGP (2004-05)				After MGNREGP (2012-13)				% Decline			
	B1	B2	B3	D	B1	B2	B3	D	B1	B2	B3	D
Cooking	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	43.7	34.5	29.4	36.2
Child care	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.2	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.7	50.4*	35.7*	31.7	40.0*
Animal care	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.7	0.7	0.9	0.9	0.8	54.4*	52.2*	50.0*	52.0*
House keeping	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.2	0.6	0.9	0.9	0.8	43.4*	28.7	28.0	33.1
Fetching water	0.3	0.9	1.1	0.8	0.3	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.0	11.8	31.8*	20.5

Source: Survey data

Note: *indicates significance difference based on z-statistic; B1, B2 and B3 represent Bilara, Phalodi and Luni blocks, respectively and D represent Jodhpur district.

Another interesting finding is that with getting employed under MGNREGP activities, time spent by women for various household activities has now reduced. The careful perusal of the Table 5 showed that work load on women relating to care of children and animals was significantly reduced after implementation of the programme in almost all the studied blocks indicating the vigorous involvement of other family members in these activities. Likewise, work relating to housekeeping (in Bilara) and fetching water (in Luni) was now actively shared by other individuals in the house.

CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that the households with

large size of land holdings were least interested in participating in MGNREGP activities; however the programme is an important means of livelihood security for the resource poor rural households. Further, the programme proved to be gender-friendly and has benefitted the participating women, both tangibly and intangibly, to a large extent. It helped in providing gainful employment to women participants and, accentuated their choices and capabilities for investments on better food baskets, children's education as well as increased their bargaining power in household's decision process.

To sum-up, the implementation of MGNREGP in the Jodhpur district of Rajasthan has been successful in empowering rural women socio-economically. Nevertheless, certain grey areas in performance of the programme have been reported across the country; the MGNREGP can play vital role in empowering women and paving the way for their greater independence and self-esteem.

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